

★ Preface for activists

...a vision of a society where it is easier for men to be good.
Peter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement

This pamphlet is written "for activists," primarily Austin activists influenced by anarchism. Activism in Austin exists as a network of sympathetic campaigns and groups. Each of these has an agenda of changes they would like to make in the world. The changes vary in scope, but always pertain to a small specific category of issues- the Sierra Club and Earth First!, for instance, advocate everything from blocking specific development projects to a full-on redesign of human space to exclude the car, but always work within a specifically environmental context.

There is plenty of overlap between "groups." Free Radio partisans are likely to support the Zapatistas, for instance, or oppose the U.S. Government bombing its competitors in the global oil market. However, the politics undergirding these connections are never made explicit.

Furthermore, the search for a revolution has become vague or else aggressively simplified. This pamphlet is an attempt to resurrect the discussion of vision. We do, of course, have positive ideals, even if we don't often speak of them or make them the basis of what we do. Instead, we tend to cluster around negatives- anti-sweatshops, anti-sprawl, anti-consumerism.

Single-issue opposition seems to be a dead-end proposition. Few single issues by themselves are desperate enough to warrant taking the risks necessary to effect any significant change. In a world where insecurity and uncertainty are the primary weapons for maintaining the status quo, few are willing to step outside the relatively "safe" sphere of protest for the sake of opposing one single aspect of the weight above them, especially when that aspect does not impact them personally.

Furthermore, relying on an instinctual understanding of the basic premises and goals of our radicalism makes it difficult to make connections outside our own small circles. Lacking any general principles with which "outsiders" can agree or disagree (or better yet, which can be argued, modified, and generally opened up to become the expression of dissent we claim we represent) our style of radicalism is associated primarily with the *people* who engage in it- and seen as irrelevant to everybody else. This limits outreach to people who are already like us- a formula for isolation, not revolution.

This pamphlet is also a call to start considering ourselves honestly as part of the revolutionary process. We need to be clear on who we are, what our limits are, what we have to offer and what our place is. We are all more than "activists"- we participate in a range of social groupings and collections. Organizing within these eliminates concern with outsider/insider dynamics. I think we tend to be resistant to acknowledging these identities because our sloganeering teaches us to loathe the communities we come from.

Also, we often don't consider what we have to offer. Sometimes, we have nothing more than slogans. At best, we bring information, contacts, and sometimes shock troops willing to take risks others aren't. I think local organizing

within our own communities is the first step towards building up a catalog of productive contributions. In my experience, the groups best able to respond and function effectively are those that are already tight, with a reasonable grasp of their own abilities, beliefs and needs.

★ What is community autonomy?

In early 1995, when over two thousand activists gathered in Berlin to discuss the autonomous movement in the twenty-first century, one of their principle themes was the concept of autonomy. Although there were numerous attempts to define it, no one even attempted to develop a rigid definition of autonomous politics that could be used with precision to explain it to the world. Apparently, the indeterminacy of the Autonomien is one of their defining features, a facet of their mysterious anonymity that permits a wide range of fact and opinion to coexist alongside a diversity of action.

George Katsifigkas

It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to define rigidly what autonomy is or what it would mean. What definition it does offer should be taken nothing more than suggestion, probably wrong. Hopefully, whatever discussion arises around these suggestions will be more enlightening.

☪ A brief summary

Community empowerment, to me, is the actualization of a community being within its own power of decision, action, sufficiency and direction, perhaps to be an empowered community interacting with other equally empowered communities... being able to produce the needs and wants of the general populace within our own power, and without desecrating the earth or cultures outside of our own.

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Community autonomy is the idea that all individual communities should control of their own situations free from interference from external political or economic power. Politically, this means the decentralization of authority, away from exterior nation-states and governments and to consensus of the community members themselves. It means extending the consensus model to interactions between communities, rather than relying on external law."

Economically, it means that material and social needs should first be met within the community, and the work of the individual members should also go to the community rather than to outside hierarchies. This does not mean adopting some communist model of transferring the means of production to a centralized, national (or international) government, but rather production without the intervention of governments, corporations or owners, or trade bodies. Bluntly, it means to "eat what you raise and raise what you eat."

Culturally, it means that each community has a right to determine its own lifeways and to pass these on to each generation. Ideologically it means pretty much doing without a single unified ideology, such as

working class - people who are by and large structurally denied access to the comfort zone (both in material terms and in a corresponding inability to avoid the imposition of a relatively high degree of systemic violence) - tend either to stand aside in bemused incomprehension of such politics or to react with outright hostility.

22. Solstice and Marshall Law. What is to be Undone? Moving from Vanguardist Activism to Community-Based Struggle. Unpublished, 1999.

23. Blackstone's Constitutional Law, 1st ed. 1895

8. US government programs of tax breaks and incentives, broadly known as corporate welfare and generally justified as means of "creating jobs" can be seen as government subsidies handed out to boost wages and stimulate production of America's largest natural resource: the captive consumer.

9. Ibid., p. 219

10. Mitchell Cohen, What is Direct Action? [pamphlet]

11. Perhaps the first incidence of "human resources" on the continent.

12. From a pamphlet entitled *Encuentro: One No, Many Yeses!* Distributed in Austin by Accion Zapatista.

13. Ibid

14. Marcos. Video address to "From Underground Culture to the Culture of Resistance" Roundtable, 10/26/99

15. Consider, for example, assuming you are white, whether you would ever feel comfortable offering a "white viewpoint on the movement" - of course you wouldn't, that's a half step away from white supremacy. On the other hand, globally speaking, resistance to colonialism and neocolonialism is an overwhelmingly non-white movement, and maybe acknowledging you speak from a particular viewpoint might be better than pretending to speak for everybody, and then letting everybody else qualify your "universal" ideas from their "ethnic" or "minority" perspectives. Hmm...

16. Anti-Mass Collective. Anti-Mass: New Ways of Organizing for Collectives. [pamphlet]

17. Ibid.

18. Quoted in: *The Black Panther*, Fall 1991 vol. 1 #3. Berkeley

19. Martin Buber. "The Organic Commonwealth" in Sources ed Theodore Roszak. Harper & Row, New York 1972. p208

20. Class War Federation, Unfinished Business: The Politics of Class War. AK Press, Glasgow Scotland 1992. p135

21. From Ward Churchill, Pacifism as Pathology. AK Press 1999 on nonviolent protest.

Small wonder that North America's ghetto, barrio and reservation populations, along with the bulk of the white

marxism, and instead trusting individual communities to develop their own beliefs and plans. It means no one group has the exclusive line on the "real truth" and that, while a vigorous discussion of ideals and cultures is vital it must be carried out respectfully by all parties.

✧ Community structures

So what are these vaunted communities, and how do we know if we are in one? Religious essayist Martin Buber, writing on decentralism, describes what he calls the cell-tissue of society as "a living and life-giving collaboration, an essentially autonomous consociation of human beings, shaping and reshaping itself from within. Society is naturally composed not of disparate individuals but of associative units and the associations between them."¹⁴ More practically, a community is a group of people who interact regularly and have something, a trade or a neighborhood, for instance, in common. Communities can also be extended families, friends, or as a thumbnail example, the list of people you might ask to watch your dog while you're out of town. These "consociations" are not fixed- they change over time, and do not necessarily have borders or membership criteria that are distinct

✧ Forces arrayed against autonomy

The reason we do not live in a better world now is not because we are 'bad', but because we are prevented from doing so.
*Class War Federation*¹

In an elaborate history of German and Italian autonomous movements, George Katsiaficas describes what he calls the "colonization of everyday life" as a process in which more and more of peoples existence comes to be dominated by profit-driven markets.

Privacy continues to be invaded, family life destroyed, job security made nonexistent, environmental conditions degraded, water made unfit to drink and the air made poisonous to our health. In short, the conditions of life are being destroyed at the same time as previously independent realms of everyday life are increasingly subsumed by the commodity form and criteria of profitability.⁶

He lists several examples of aspects of life, including the growing and preparation of food, construction of shelter and care and education of children and the elderly, which were formerly carried out within families and the immediate community, but now are contracted out to for-profit businesses. He is clear to point out that this is not because families and communities are opting out, choosing an elusive life of leisure over mundane responsibility as corporate apologists insist, but because their time, energy and independence have been so compromised by an aggressive commodity system. Every new convenience that is supposed to give us more free time invariably ends up becoming one more necessary cost of living- cars bring suburbs that require cars, credit cards bring types of transactions (car rentals, for instance) that require credit cards. Katsiaficas is also clear to point out that government works with industry to bring about this general for-profit dependency:

The trend today is for increasing government regulation of previously autonomous arenas of life: child-rearing practices, family relations, reproduction, divorce, and

individual consumption of everything from food to drugs.

Unlike in semi-socialized Germany and Britain, "colonization of everyday life" in the US means that many have no legal means of survival. Those denied access to the government-subsidized⁸ high-wage new economy for reasons of education, race, social or economic class or other factors, simply do not have the money to pay for for-profit childcare (for instance.) Many seek non-commercial sources for these essentials - neighborhood "kid-watchers" - and find themselves criminalized by government regulations designed specifically to protect the profit of the unaffordable businesses, in this example, daycare licensing law. Those who choose community or autonomous methods for survival for non-financial reasons find themselves similarly criminalized. Examples include midwives who cater to mothers who prefer home-birth, or home-schoolers who prefer not to have their children educated by church, state, or private business.

Those who choose to avoid the risks of illegality find their lives increasingly controlled by wage-labor, separated and alienated from the families and communities they entered the workforce to protect and support. No option within the colonized system allows us any sort of dignity.

The German Autonomes, Katsiaficas writes:

...seek to defend and extend the independence of civil society, to safeguard their neighborhoods and collective relationships from the system's ever-thicker web of hierarchy and commodity relationships.⁹

➤ Proposed principles and rights

The following is a proposal for guiding principles and rights. It is the least researched part of this pamphlet and arguably the most critical. The only purpose for laying it out here is to provide a basis for discussion on the topic- this is not a final document and probably never should be finalized.

1. **Community**
 - a. Human beings have a right to associate, interact, and define their lives together in communities of their own creation and choosing
2. **Autonomy**
 - a. Autonomous communities have a right to exist by their own definitions, with precise or fluid boundaries, without needing to justify or subject themselves to any outside hierarchy.
 - b. Autonomous communities have the right to political self-determination
 - c. Autonomous communities have the right to economic self-determination
 - d. Autonomous communities have the right to their own culture and spirituality.
3. **Dignity**
 - a. Autonomous communities have a right to their own dignity and pride.
4. **Solidarity**
 - a. Autonomous communities have the responsibility to assist each other in protecting their autonomy, community rights, or the human rights of individuals from infringement by hierarchical

★ Bibliography

1. Quoted in: Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness. Harper Collins, New York 1952. p181
 2. George Katsiaficas. The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life. Humanities Press International, Highlands NJ 1997 p. 198
 3. Peter Maurin, *ibid*
 4. Martin Buber. "The Organic Commonwealth" in Sources. ed. Theodore Roszak. Harper & Row, New York 1972. p200
 5. Quoted in: Class War Federation, Unfinished Business: The Politics of Class War. AK Press, Glasgow Scotland 1992. p120
 6. George Katsiaficas, The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life. Humanities Press Int'l, Highlands NJ 1997. p.5
- Katsiaficas' book, like Zinn's People's History of the United States, should be required reading throughout the western world. He structures his analysis of autonomy in three parts:
1. Within production, automation, coupled with capitalist social relations, dictates increasing unemployment and marginalization for a large fraction (perhaps one-third) of the population of advanced capitalist societies (as well as untold millions at the periphery of the world system)
 2. The system's increasing need for arenas of profitable activity spurs colonization of the lifeworld, destroying autonomous domains previously governed by symbolic reason- particularly in relation to women, youth, and senior citizens- and uniformly subjecting these dimensions of everyday life to instrumentalized rationality that stimulates movements for decolonization of these domains.
 3. The system's disregard for "externalities," coupled with the insatiable structural imperative of increasing profitability, leads to the destruction of natural habitat and the unreasonable production of infrastructure such as giant nuclear power plants and megabridges and tunnels that are part of socially unnecessary and environmentally destructive highway systems.
7. *Ibid*, p.258

to succeed; and when the new order proposed to be introduced will be more satisfactory to the people in general than that which is to be displaced. Revolution is either a forcible breach of the established constitution or a violation of its principles. Thus, as a rule, revolutions are not matter of right, although they are mighty natural phenomenon which alter public law. Where the powers which are passionately stirred in the people are unchained, and produce a revolutionary eruption, the regular operation of constitutional law is disturbed. In the presence of revolution, law is impotent. It is, indeed, a great task of practical politics to bring back revolutionary movements as soon as possible into the regular channels of constitutional reform. There can be no right of revolution, unless exceptionally; it can only be justified by that necessity which compels a nation to save its existence or to secure its growth where the ways of reform are closed. The constitution is only the external organization of the people, and if by means of it the state itself is in danger of perishing, or if vital interests of the public weal are threatened, necessity knows no law.²³

Blackstone's Constitutional Law, 1st ed. 1895

- authorities.
- b. Autonomous communities have the responsibility to act in a way that considers the autonomy, dignity, and survival of future generations as it does their own
- 5. Survival
 - a. Autonomous communities have the right to determine and provide their own necessities for survival.
 - b. Autonomous communities have the right to continue their independence, cultures and values across generations.
 - c. Autonomous communities have the right to defend themselves, their rights, and the human rights of their constituent individuals.

★ What should we be doing already?

If we are to consider ourselves as revolutionaries, we must acknowledge that we have an obligation to succeed in pursuing revolution.
Kwame Ninsin (Stokely Carmichael)

☼ If the mainstream is so happy with the status quo, why is prozac so popular? Recognizing widespread dissent

Revolutionaries call up, unleash and unify the hidden longings of people *that are already in them* (as opposed to "teaching," "conveying," mechanically "leading," "raising the consciousness of," "bringing in from the outside," "lobbying," "sending a message to" and all the rest of the drivel that passes for "organizing" by the left in the US) and embody those longings in ongoing forms, communities or entities. That is what constitutes "conscious political work."
*Mitchell Cohen, What is direct action?*²⁴

We have inherited from recent generations of dissent the idea that outside of our own activist circles, Americans are self-satisfied, glutted with worldly smugness, and directly interested in supporting the status quo. We term these people yuppies, rednecks or just "average TV-watching Americans," criticize them endlessly for their ignorance and continued participation in a genocidal system, and make no attempt to investigate the dynamics of their situation.

Declaring ourselves to be "against" the rest of society dismisses too easily the social privilege in the form of education, confidence, ability to form easy relationships with other privileged people, etc. that is necessary to "live in a good way" - that is, maintain minimal visible dependence on problematic parts of the system. It is not we are uniquely capable of understanding, we are just more likely to have heard of our particular alternatives from people we trust, who tend to be people with similar backgrounds.

In fact, discontent and resistance are widespread in America. We are not so exceptional in our motives - the ideals of freedom, justice and above all dignity are not exclusive to anarchists. Rage runs deep, in the barrio and the neighborhood, no matter how thoroughly people have accommodated their own lifestyles to what can broadly be called the system. We have all been robbed of the means of survival, and the extent to which people have

seemingly given up their lives to mass culture as a way of getting some part of that survival back is no index of how angry they are at the compromises they have had to make and losses they have experienced. More importantly, it is no index of how readily they would jump up to create an alternative. Many are already involved in doing so:

If we recognize that the unconscious psychological dynamics of people in motion even when they are joining fascist groups, or when they are members of so-called gangs and militias are propelled by a thirst for liberation, for connection, for empowerment, for meaning in their lives however distorted a form it may take...
Mitchell Cohen, What Is Direct Action?

Why aren't we already working alongside the "gangs and militias"? Much of this pamphlet is based on the humanitarian idea that the "real world" people speak of is frequently the world of compromise and loss, and the bitterness that goes with it. People know when they are giving up their freedom and their dreams, and they hate it.

◎ Participation, not leadership

Since Seattle, talk of a "new movement" or a "new spirit of resistance" has become fashionable not only among commentators in news periodicals but on the activist scene as well. This is bunk- there is a spirit of resistance, but it is nothing new. While there has been a rise in the profile of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial activity, the only significant change is that greater numbers of educated middle-class western whites are joining a movement- or group of movements- that have been continuing in this part of the world for over five hundred years, since Columbus first decided to enslave the Arawaks."

It is important to remember and be humbled by this history. We are not "starting" or "defining" a movement, nor are we, as some arrogantly claim, *the* movement in and of ourselves. We don't even have the right to make any sweeping statement defining or representing what the larger movement is about. We need to be careful about this; although we are a very small portion of the "resistance" we can easily represent ourselves as "leaders" or "spokespersons" simply because we look like and have a background like our dominant culture's image of a leader or spokesperson.

If we are to contribute constructively, then, we need to do so in a spirit of participation, not leadership or organizing. We need to be clear on who we are and what we have to offer. We need to recognize ourselves as one community among others, with defining characteristics- some of which we may not be very comfortable with- with the legitimate responsibility to speak for and provide for our own needs, and to act in solidarity when called upon. But we need to realize that what we call "putting our organizing ability to work for so-and-so" so-and-so likely calls "taking over."

◎ Not to teach but to learn

So how then do we "call up, unleash and unify the hidden longings" of ourselves and others without resorting to "consciousness raising" (from "your" low level to "our" esoteric level, presumably) or other vanguard techniques? The Zapatistas have developed a model called the *encuentro*, the encounter between various cultural or political groups who have "refused the logic of a status quo governed by national and international capitalist relations, state power and their local manifestations."¹² Far from coming together- "unifying," in leftspeak- over one ideology or plan, it is to be understood "that no single voice, organization, sector or force can be privileged as the defining agent of revolutionary

perspective- that of the white, middle-class anarchist american activist. If community autonomy is to have any legitimacy at all, and if we take seriously the idea that we need to learn more than we need to educate, then this pamphlet will need to be one out of many, rigorously critiqued and rewritten from a variety of perspectives. Therefore, this last section is a call for other people involved in other ways (or not at all) to rewrite the theory of community autonomy, or at least point out the pig-headed blunders in this draft or the reasons for discarding it altogether.

Most importantly, it needs to be reconstructed by people outside the "activist" community. Much of what has been written here is a reaction to characteristic "activist" misperceptions. Presumably, many remain, and many other bad organizing habits already abandoned by "activists" but still in wide circulation elsewhere need to be corrected as well.

Probably the next most important concern is how this version of community autonomy will work with critiques that come from outside a white middle-class american experience, such as the Black Panther Party's "revolutionary intercommunalism." It should go without saying why.

Also, embarrassingly, this whole pamphlet contains nothing from an eco-centric vantage point- no mention of environmental concerns at all, actually, other than the idea of maintaining solidarity with far future generations. This is something of an unfortunate lack of scope, although it shouldn't be expected that any one pamphlet would encompass all possible aspects of liberation. Any takers?

Contact Austin Community Autonomy with your comments and rewrites- the info is inside the front cover.

★ Blackstone's Right of Revolution

Blackstone's, a standard reference to the fundamentals of the "common law" basis for our legal system has this to say about revolution:

The right of revolution is the inherent right of a people to cast out their rulers, change their polity, or effect radical reforms in their system of government or institutions, by force or a general uprising, when the legal and constitutional methods of making such changes have proved inadequate, or are so obstructed as to be unavailable.

This right is a fundamental, natural right of the whole people, not existing in virtue of the constitution but in spite of it. It belongs to the people as a necessary inference from the freedom and independence of the nation. But revolution is entirely outside the pale of the law. Inter armes silent leges. Circumstances alone can justify a resort to the extreme measure of a revolution. In general, this right may be said to exist when tyranny or a corrupt and vicious government is entrenched in power, so that it cannot be dislodged by legal means; or when the system of government has become intolerable for other causes, and the evils to be expected from a revolutionary rising are not so great as those which must be endured under the existing order of things; when the attempt is reasonably certain

important than any single improvement we may make.

Often one's faith in protest is tied to one's social privilege- more privileged people are used to their complaints being taken seriously by existing powers, while less privileged people tend to be more cynical. AIM member Ward Churchill and others have shown that relying on forms of protest is a good way to further alienate the already disenfranchised.²¹ The movements that have posed the most lasting threats to state power have been those like MOVE which have had no faith in the system whatsoever; they were successful in part because they were forced to provide for the needs and defense of their own communities without appealing to the government. We need to consciously use and encourage tactics that "implement [our demands] for ourselves."

Mindful that this includes both property destruction and the establishment of Free Schools, barricades and growing one's own food, it is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to determine exactly what our tactics should be. This is also not the place to rehash the violence/non-violence debate, or the question of whether property discussion constitutes violence. I would like to refer to an accurate if unpublished critique by Solstice and Marshall Law, two organizers from the Minnehaha Free State.

Their thesis was simply that discussing specific tactics out of context is diversionary. Framing the discussion as a question whether a particular course of action will cost or gain public support presupposes a separate and non-participant public or "mass," which is a bigger problem than whether window smashing looks bad on TV. Their solution is that the "public" must actually be part of the action itself. Solstice uses the example:

I recall an anti-hog factory meeting where members of a coalition were informally discussing an act of sabotage that had occurred in which construction machinery was destroyed. To my surprise there was only praise for the action. This was not a group of eco-anarchists. Most of the people were registered voters, more older than younger, patriots with few exceptions. What was key to their embracing this radical tactic was, first of all, that their community was at stake; its economic and ecological health and its power of self-determination. The community made its decision--nearly unanimously--against hog factories in their region. Committed citizens opposed the corporations in public forums and through the legal process, but to no avail. They then held demonstrations. When finally the corporations disregarded the will of the community, continuing with their plans, they were met not with a radical tactic but with a reasonable community response to an invading force.²²

It is important to realize that it is entirely a matter of context which actions or programs are seen as extreme. In some situations, sabotage is a safer, more conservative approach than letter writing. In others, the reverse is true.

★ Call for outside critique

Despite all the citations, this pamphlet has essentially been written from a single

or historical transformation... the Zapatistas have themselves refused to impose their solutions or 'yeses' on those with whom they are in dialogue."¹³ Subcomandante Marcos writes:

The model of *encuentro*, as event and as process, depends on the mutual recognition of the dignity of the participants and is based on the hope that the common "NO!" may be clarified and strengthened and that the "Many Yeses" may intersect, join, diverge, grow, multiply, flourish as they may.¹⁴

In other words, the goal of outreach, and revolution in general is not to teach but to learn.

Maintaining an evenhanded dialogue in which all parties learn, however, is often difficult for "activists" schooled first in the racial, class, and cultural supremacy of a genocidal culture and then in political elitism and exclusionary lifestyle fascism. Our impulse to disregard or condemn "yuppies," "Christians," "hunters" or "rednecks" (or other political formations who do not adhere to non-hierarchical principles) prevents us from recognizing the legitimacy of the needs of the people we classify and their right to live autonomously now, and not just after they come around to "our" way of thinking. Less obviously, the contributions of people from other racial or class groupings are often either discounted entirely or else seen only as the representative "minority" aspect of a "larger" (meaning white and middle class) critique or movement.¹⁵

As critical as recognizing our own specific background and identity is recognizing how our own insecurities- and indoctrination in western culture- impede our recognition of the dignity of people from other backgrounds and identities. This disrespect and the corresponding assumption that as "leaders" (not "participants") it is our role to determine the meaning and direction of the movement builds insurmountable walls between us and virtually everybody else on the planet

☺ If it speaks with one voice, it ain't the people: Anti-mass

To focus on decentralized participation and mutual respect rather than leadership requires looking beyond mass organizing. We are the inheritors of a tradition of dissent that relies heavily on unifying crowds of individually silent people behind a prepared "representative" platform. We have learned to regard participation as a matter of numbers- signatures on a petition, percent of the popular vote, attendance at a march, number of individual cities participating in designated days of action. The individual intents, needs, and perspectives of these so-called participants, not to mention their identities, are lost and only their numerical support for "the voice of the people" is recorded.

Mass organizing, especially by white, educated Americans, replicates exactly the forms of consumerism, hierarchy and disempowerment we're opposing. Just as offering McChicken and McFish as well as McBeef doesn't give a consumer power or control over their nutrition or their food supply, just as offering two near-identical candidates for election doesn't give a voter control over the political situation of their life, allowing people to join a defined and "unified" movement is not giving them any sort of opportunity to take a hand in remedying the conditions of their individual oppression.

To counter this, we can work within the context of events and associations that are non-hierarchical and small enough that every participant has a chance, from day one, to hear and be heard by every other, and to have significant input on the actions and positions of the larger group. The Anti-Mass manifesto, written in the seventies, describes this sort of

intentionally small collective in great detail.

Media actions, by definition are also mass actions: the non-participant masses are the TV viewers and newspaper readers at home. Choosing to "reach out" to people through one-way media is a forced silencing of one half of the dialogue. We need to be careful that our own style of media-flyers, for instance- doesn't do the same. Most importantly, we need to keep face-to-face communication at an absolute priority. As anti-mass put it:

By all means the collective also communicates with other people, but it never views them as a mass- a constituency or audience. The collective communicates with individuals to encourage self-organization.

Anti-Mass¹⁸

✧ Solidarity!

However, there are many situations in which large numbers of people are necessary. Under the principle of mutual aid, it is the responsibility of all autonomous groups to act in such a way as to support and defend each other, and their right to expect the assistance in return. The principles of the IWW- an injury to one is an injury to all- and of Class War- all for one and one for all- are other ways of stating this solidarity principle.

Solidarity, however, does not require unification. There is no need for individual communities to submerge their differences and mutual critiques to act for each other on their own terms. Forming one united front is not the goal of solidarity.

Insofar as unity has suppressed real political differences- class, racial, sexual- it is a form of tyranny. The dream of unity is in reality a nightmare of compromise and suppressed desires.¹⁷

Another aspect of solidarity too rarely considered is maintaining solid, supportive and responsible solidarity with generations yet to come. Just as a community must consider the effects of its actions on other autonomous communities, it must also consider the effect on the future, unforeseeable as that may be. Anything that will impede the ability of our children and grandchildren to live autonomously with dignity is an injury to ourselves as well.

✧ Local Focus

Social Emergency- Local Insurgency!

SDS

It goes without saying that any approach that focuses on face-to-face relations between small, autonomous groups must also focus locally. It is important to maintain communication and solidarity with other autonomous communities globally, but it is definitely beyond the abilities of any collective, no matter how politically astute, to organize on a large scale without stumbling into mass issues.

✧ Flexibility and self-critique

We can only be repressed if we stop thinking and stop fighting.

George Jackson¹⁸

Without a constant, rigorous analytical process to back it up, no strategy or idea can survive. This analysis is necessary to allow us to evaluate ourselves, change our approach, and change it for the better when we do. We need to constantly hold every aspect of our thinking, as well as our action, up for review. Even the notion of community needs to be open to change. Baber, again, writes:

Community should not be made into a principle; it, too, should always satisfy a situation rather than an abstraction. The realization of community, like the realization of any idea, cannot occur once and for all time: always it must be the moment's answer to the moment's question and nothing more.¹⁹

This analysis need not be realized in the form of a small clique of organizers and writers doing the thinking for everyone. On the contrary, we need to make a conscious effort to avoid becoming the intellectual wing of someone else's movement. To develop an ethic of self-criticism, we need to adopt a position like that of the Class War Federation: "Our aim is to make everyone an intellectual."²⁰

✧ Direct action

From the moment we begin to think about what to include in our programs of action, demands and slogans- that is, from the moment we begin to act consciously- we must be guided by one overriding question: "How do we begin immediately to implement this (and every) demand for ourselves?"

Mitchell Cohen, What is Direct Action? P 10

If we take community self-determination seriously as a goal, we have to make sure not to use tactics that continue our dependency on state power. Protest, from rallies to riots, petitions to pies, is essentially an appeal to existing power in the form of a government, a business or an international trade council to take action on our behalf. This is counterproductive for two reasons.

First, embedded in the idea of protest is the liberal assumption that government and industry are set up to act in our best interests and need only to hear that our interests lie in a particular course of action. Our colonized minds have trouble accepting the idea that in fact, government and industry does not operate in our best interest, and could actually care less about our best interest, and is therefore likely to ignore protest unless it can be recuperated as a means to further their dominance.

The other problem with indirect action is that the structures of power are not even challenged. Autonomy demands that we meet our needs and correct the injustices against us without- or in spite of- the intervention of the state or big business. Our ability to act on our own behalf to improve our situation is more